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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PARTY OF THE WORLD, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

Written statement submitted by the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[20 January 1998]

1. The International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH) and its member organization, the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights in Bahrain (CDHRB), wish to express their ongoing concern regarding the massive and systematic violations of human rights in Bahrain.

2. The violations have continued in spite of the commitments expressed by the Government of Bahrain during the last session of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, which adopted a resolution condemning the violations of human rights in Bahrain and requesting the Commission to consider the situation.

Persistent use of torture on a large scale and appalling prison conditions

3. Torture and ill-treatment have continued to be practised routinely in the prisons. The most common methods of torture are: keeping the person standing for several days, beating over the whole body while the person is tied up or hanged with the toes just touching the ground, burning with cigarettes. Among the persons who were recently tortured are: Ali Yousif Hobail; Akil Al Madani, arrested on 5 September 1997, tortured severely and released on 8 September; Mohamed Ahmed Juma, arrested on 3 September 1997, detained incommunicado and tortured; Nizar Al Pari; Ahmed Edrees. The first two persons were tortured at Al Qala prison, which is part of the complex that also includes the Ministry of Interior as well as the Security and Intelligence Services (SIS). All these persons have suffered serious health deterioration. Some detainees died in custody because of torture, appalling prison conditions or denial of medical treatment. Some are released just before they die, a tactic used to avoid scandal. Such was the case of Abd Ali Jassim Issa, 45 years old, from Al Noaim, who died on 18 August at Salmania hospital after his release, as a result of the torture inflicted to him in detention. The Government has never led any investigation on the alleged cases of torture. Not only do the perpetrators enjoy impunity, but they are encouraged and rewarded by their superiors. Moreover, some State officials, such as Colonel Adel Flaifel and Colonel Khaled Al-Wazan, of the SIS, are directly involved in the perpetration of torture.

Discrimination against the majority Muslim Shiite population and political opponents

4. The policy of sectarian discrimination against the Muslim Shi'a population is of particular concern, especially in the sector of education since former General Abdul-Aziz Al-Fadel became Minister of Education in June 1995 and former Colonel Mohamed Al-Ghatam was appointed President of the University of Bahrain. There is only one Shi'a on the University Council and only one Dean who belongs to this group. Several Shi'a teachers were forced to resign or were downgraded, and Shi'a students are discriminated against in the enrolment in the university. (For further information, please refer to the reports submitted by FIDH and CDHRB to the fifty-second session of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.)

Use of excessive force by police

5. The anti-riot police use excessive force to quell protests, using firearms and canister gas bombs. Several minors were wounded by plastic

bullets. The anti-riot police and SIS elements have carried out raids against districts or villages whose residents are considered to be opponents, attacking places, searching houses, ransacking belongings, beating people and arresting many residents, including children. Among the targeted areas: Duraz (10 August), Manama (20 August), Karana (12 September), Bani Jamra (22 October).

Unfair trials

6. Trials of many political defendants, including women and children, have continued to be held before the State Security Court. This court was established by decree and is far from respecting the internationally recognized standards such as the right to a fair trial. Recently, a group of eight personalities from the opposition who live in exile and are known for their peaceful activities in favour of democracy, were charged with high treason, conspiracy with foreign States and inciting terrorism. They are Shaikh Ali Salman, Shaikh Haider Al Sitir, Shaikh Hamza Al Dair, Dr. Mansur Al-Jamri, Dr. Saed Al-Shehabi, Shaikh Khalil Sultan, Shaikh Adel Al-Shola and Mohammed Habib Mansur Al-Shafaf. The first five were condemned to 15 years' imprisonment each and a total fine of 3 million United States dollars. The last three were condemned to five years' imprisonment. Before the trial, the government-controlled media had launched a campaign against them. The defendants were not notified officially of the date of the trial. The trial was not public and the defendants were tried in absentia and denied the rights to defence lawyers. Another recent example is the case of five minors (Jaffar M. Ali, 17; Ali Ahmed, 17; Hashem A. Al Ali, 16; Abas H. Ahmed, 16; Mohammed Ali, 16) from Bori village, arrested on 13 September after protesting peacefully and charged with burning cars, and tried before the State Security Court.

Restrictions on the freedom of opinion and expression, the freedom of the press and the freedom of association

7. Freedom of expression is also severely restricted in Bahrain. Recently, Al-Nahda Women Society was banned from holding a funeral ceremony upon the death of its former President, Aziza Al-Basam, due to her pro-democracy advocacy. The ceremony held on the fortieth day after her death was attacked and ended by the police. The Government directly controls the broadcast media, and the print media is subjected to strong State censorship as well as self-censorship. Mr. Mohammed Al-Gasra, UPI correspondent, was detained, interrogated and forced to resign from his job and Mrs. Ismat Al-Muswai, BBC correspondent, was forced to stop her job under pressure and threat. No independent association can work freely in Bahrain. All human rights associations have to work in exile. In the education sphere, in October, the administrative committees of the students' society, which used to be appointed by the students, were appointed by the President of the University. Another recent example is the case of six candidates for election of the Chamber of Commerce from the "Reform and Change" list, who were forbidden, by order of the Prime Minister, to stand; among them was Dr. Nezar Al-Baharna, former Vice-President of the University of Bahrain, who had been sacked.

Religious intolerance

8. There is no religious freedom in Bahrain and the Shi'a face religious intolerance. Important Shi'a mosques (such as Al-Sadeq at Al-Qufol-Manama, Al-Khawja at Manama, Bani Jamra, Sanabis, Al-Nabih Saleh) were shut down and Friday mass prayers in these mosques were prohibited by force. Among these mosques on 15, 21 and 22 October, some mosques and hussainiat (such as Tobli, Sh. Aziz mosque at Sihla and matam Ben Khamees at Sanabis) were attacked and ransacked and people were beaten. These events took place following protests following the appointment of members of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs - headed by Minister of Justice Sh. Abdulla Bin Khalid, a member of the Al-Khalifah ruling family - which increased religious intolerance towards the Shi'a population.

Arbitrary arrests and detentions

9. In the middle of 1997, there were no less than 1,500 political detainees in Bahrain; more persons have been arbitrarily arrested since then, including minors. It is of particular concern that some political detainees are kept in detention and tortured after having completed their sentence. Such is the case of Mohammed Salman, 18, and Hani Khames, 22, who completed their sentences on 22 October. Instead of being released from Dockyard prison, they were transferred to Al-Qala complex where they were severely tortured.

Forced exile

10. The Government has continued to forcibly exile opponents, to deny returning citizens entry to their homeland and to banish them. Recent examples are the cases of Abdul-Hassan Al-Saru, 77, and his family, who were forced into exile to the United Arab Emirates on 30 September after six days' detention, and Abd-Ali Sarhan forced into exile to Kuwait on 15 October.

Recommendations

11. The FIDH and the CDHRB call upon the Bahraini authorities:

(a) To restore the rule of law;

(b) To comply with internationally recognized human rights standards and, in particular, to guarantee the physical integrity of all detainees, the right to a fair trial, and the freedoms of opinion, association and belief;

(c) To ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;

(d) To cooperate with the United Nations human rights mechanisms, in particular by reporting to the treaty bodies on the implementation of the instruments to which Bahrain is a party.

12. The FIDH and the CDHRB call upon the Commission on Human Rights:

(a) To condemn the massive and systematic violations of human rights in Bahrain;

(b) To follow the request of the Sub-Commission and decide to consider the situation of human rights in Bahrain under its agenda item entitled "Question of the violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in any part of the world, with particular attention to colonial and other dependent countries and territories, by appointing a monitoring mechanism in charge of reporting on the situation at its fifty-fifth session.